

# **GEORGE WASHINGTON BIRTHPLACE NATIONAL MONUMENT**

## **LONG RANGE INTERPRETIVE PLAN**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

As a result of the Comprehensive Interpretive Plan process, the interpretive program at George Washington Birthplace National Monument has been reinvigorated and redirected in the following ways:

- Shift from generic colonial plantation interpretation and its material culture to George Washington's life and accomplishments.
- Shift from focusing on Washington's young years to his entire life of achievement.
- Create an integrated and complete park experience that goes beyond the commemorative area and now includes all park resources in telling the story of Washington's contributions and experiences.
- Create more opportunities for dialogue with subject matter experts within NPS and beyond to stay abreast of recent scholarship and to stimulate ideas for keeping the interpretive program current and provocative.
- Shift from generic education programs for lower grades to developing and phasing in curriculum-based education programs for higher graded students which meet the state of Virginia standards of learning, and development of education programs with the involvement of local educators.
- Continue three newly introduced programs (initiated as a result of the Long Range Interpretive Plan workshops) which are linked to the new interpretive themes and the shift toward Washington's life and achievements.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This Long Range Interpretive Plan (LRIP) is the first section of George Washington Birthplace National Monuments (GEWA) Comprehensive Interpretive Plan (CIP). It describes the desired future for the park's entire interpretive program and presents the actions the park will take over the next 5 years to achieve it. This comprehensive approach to interpretive planning considers and encompasses the purpose and significance of the site, the parkwide interpretive themes and the desired experience for all people interested in the park resources and stories. It then selects a variety of interpretive methods and programs, both personal and non-personal (media), to effectively convey messages about the park's purpose, significance, themes and park issues to all visitors, on or off-site.

The primary intended audience for this plan includes National Park Service (NPS) personnel duty stationed at GEWA, GEWA volunteers, especially those who have a role in the interpretive program, other NPS personnel with an interest in GEWA, and park partners as appropriate.

This plan was developed with the participation and input from NPS staff at GEWA and the support offices in Philadelphia and Boston, and subject matter experts during five facilitated workshops held at the park over a one and a half year period. A complete list of planning team participants appears in the back of this document.

## **DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND RESOURCES**

GEWA preserves George Washington's birth home site, now marked by an oyster-shell outline of the original foundation, as well as 550 acres of the original 1,300 acre Washington Family Plantation, the home of three generations of Washingtons dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The site is located on the banks of Popes Creek and the Potomac River, 38 miles east of Fredericksburg, Virginia.

In addition to the birth home site, the park includes the following features:

- Washington Family burial ground
- John Washington's house site, George's great grandfather (archeological)
- Commemorative landscape designed to resemble elements of a colonial plantation including a museum (known as the Memorial House) filled with period objects, a colonial garden, and a farm with historic breeds of livestock, historic allee of red cedar trees and red cedar grove
- Memorial obelisk

- Several trails throughout the site
  - George Washington Heritage Trail
  - Nature Trail
  - Purple Heart Trail
  - Popes Creek Historic Trail
  - Potomac Heritage Trail
  - Northern Neck Heritage Trail
- Henry Brooks' house site, a Washington family neighbor (archeological)
- Swimming beach and picnic area
- 17<sup>th</sup> century ice pond (under research as to whether pond was used by Washingtons for refrigeration)
- Evidence of 17<sup>th</sup> century agricultural ditches and fields
- Visitor center and bookstore

## **PART I. FOUNDATION FOR GEORGE WASHINGTON BIRTHPLACE NATIONAL MONUMENT'S INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM**

This section presents GEWA's park purpose, park significance and interpretive themes, a discussion about issues and influences for interpretation and a discussion about GEWA's visitors. This body of information forms the foundation for the park's future interpretive program, presented in Part 2 of this plan.

### **PARK PURPOSE**

The park's purpose statement summarizes the reasons the park was established for inclusion in the National Park System. It is based on the park's enabling legislation (approved January 23, 1930) and is expected to remain constant over the long term. The enabling legislation provides the following guidance:

[The Park] is hereby established and set apart for the preservation of the historical associations connected with [the birth and achievements of George Washington] and for the benefit and enjoyment of the people...

The Wakefield Association was established by legislation...

...to build, operate and maintain upon the plot of ground owned by the United States at Wakefield...a replica, as nearly as may be practicable, of the house in which George Washington was born, to be used and occupied in such manner and for such purposes in preserving the memory of George Washington as may be appropriate.

## **PARK SIGNIFICANCE**

Statements of significance describe a park's distinctive natural, cultural or recreational resources or values, why they are important within a national or international context, and why they contribute to the purpose of the park. In 1997, the following significance statements were developed by the staff of GEWA during their strategic management planning process.

George Washington Birthplace National Monument was established on January 23, 1930, as one of the first historic sites in the National Park System. The park memorializes George Washington and his birthsite along with the preservation of remaining nationally significant historic resources associated with his early life. The monument contains the heart of the plantation grounds owned by Augustine Washington, George's father, and the foundation of the house in which George was born. The Washington Family Burial Ground which contains the remains of George Washington's father, grandfather and great grandfather is located here. The site continues to be archeologically rich and ready to yield additional artifacts.

## **DIRECTION FOR INTERPRETATION IN PLANNING DOCUMENTS**

### **The 1997 Strategic Management Plan**

The 1997 Strategic Management Plan for GEWA presents five Mission Goals for the major park functions and operations. Mission goals represent the ideal condition that the park wants to attain or maintain. This plan is guided by the park mission goals in Appendix and presents actions which will work towards achieving the ideal condition for visitor experiences.

### **General Management Plan**

There has never been a general management plan (GMP) for GEWA. The park's only comprehensive guidance has been provided by the 1968 Master Plan and subsequent studies about park resources and issues. The park ranks high in need of a GMP and efforts are underway to start the process. All other relevant documents are located in the park's Interpretive Database.

### **1997 Interpretation and Education Strategy**

In 1997, the Northeast Region unveiled its strategy for interpretation and education entitled "The Road Ahead: A Strategy to Achieve Excellence in Interpretation and Education in the National Park Service." The interpretive planning process for GEWA was guided in part by this strategy resulting in specific actions which will work toward achieving the region's interpretation and education goals. The strategy document is located in the park's Interpretive Database.

## **PARKWIDE INTERPRETIVE THEMES**

In the National Park Service, interpretive themes are key ideas that capture the meaning of nationally significant resources associated with National Park sites. They provide the focus for the park's entire interpretive program, including personal services and media.

Interpretive themes set the political, economic, social and intellectual context for the park story, connecting park resources to the larger processes, systems, ideas and values of which they are a part. They embody a complete, well-rounded perspective and do not reflect bias or one particular point-of-view.

The following interpretive themes were developed as a result of a series of workshops held at GEWA involving a cross-section of park staff and subject matter experts. Primary themes are those stories that must be communicated to every visitor because they are essential to understanding the significance of the park's resources. Subthemes flow directly out of themes and focus on messages which are particularly important or compelling.

The objectives which follow the theme and subthemes are related to conveying that theme and specifically state what we want the visitor to learn from their visit to the site.

### **Primary Interpretive Theme:**

**George Washington was the transcendent leader of the American Revolutionary era whose actions were crucial to the establishment of the United States as an independent nation founded on principles of universal liberty.**

**Objectives:** After visiting the site, visitors will be able to...

...describe the leadership qualities of George Washington and how he applied them during the Revolutionary War, the movement that led to the formation of the Constitution, and his presidency.

...contrast the world George Washington was born into in 1732 with the world at his death in 1799 and describe his role in bringing about those changes.

### **Subtheme:**

**George Washington was born on the periphery of the English-speaking world, into a colonial society which helped shape his character and equipped him for successful careers as surveyor, planter, soldier and statesman.**

This society was based on an economy that produced tobacco for export using enslaved laborers. Success in this society required an intimate understanding of agriculture and the resources of the natural world. Washington's family were members of the plantation gentry, a level of Virginia society that nurtured leadership, management ability, and self-discipline. Leadership and public service were expected.

**Objectives:** After visiting the site, visitors will be able to:

- state where George Washington was born.
- describe the social and economic circumstances of the Washington family, and discuss the political and religious values characteristic of their social status.
- identify resources at the park that date to the Washington's family time.
- describe how the experiences of Washington's early life, including the experience of growing up on a plantation, influenced his later actions.

**Subtheme:**

**Efforts to memorialize Washington's life and achievements began before his death and have continued for more than 200 years.**

Among the most significant have been the efforts to memorialize him at the site of his birth, which began in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and culminated in the 1930s with the establishment of George Washington Birthplace National Monument, one of the first historic sites in the National Park System.

**Objectives:** After visiting the site, visitors will be able to...

- ...point out resources at the park that commemorate George Washington.
- ...name sites outside the park that commemorate George Washington.
- ...describe other ways Washington's memory has been honored.
- ...compare and contrast the present park landscape from the landscape of Washington's time.

**Subtheme:**

**George Washington led a revolution that asserted principles of universal freedom, but in the new nation full personal liberty and civic participation were limited to free white men.**

The principles of universal freedom asserted in the American Revolution nonetheless led toward the expansion of personal and political liberty to all Americans without regard to race or gender.



Objectives: After visiting the site, visitors will be able to...

- ...describe George Washington's ideas about slavery and how they were reflected in his actions.
- ...compare the role and status of women (white and black) with that of white and black men of the period.
- ...describe how the American Revolution effected the lives of women and African Americans.

## OVERALL DESIRED VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Visitors have opportunities to...

- feel welcome and important as though they were the first visitor to enter the park.
- choose from a variety of ways to explore the park resources and stories.
- find messages about George Washington based on current scholarship.
- experience all of the site to appreciate how the setting helped to shape Washington's character.
- contemplate George Washington, his upbringing and contributions.
- participate in curriculum based education programs designed to enhance formal education and to excite learners of all ages.
- access educational materials and resources that reinforce their learning objectives.
- find information about future programs.
- find out how to learn more about Washington after they leave the park.
- find information on other places to visit related to park themes.
- understand that the site is part of the NPS system and find information about the other sites in the system.
- understand what we (NPS) do and why.
- enjoy their visit.

## **VISITOR PROFILES**

### **Visitation**

The following information on visitor profiles is based on traffic counts, head counts and fee collection counts.

1998 annual visitation: 105,912

The distribution of visitors varies throughout the year as follows:

1998 seasonal visitation: Winter - 14,147, daily average 157  
Spring - 39,532, daily average 434  
Summer - 32,797, daily average 356  
Fall - 19,436, daily average 211

### **A General Visitor Profile:**

Visitors to the park are diverse in terms of age as well as where they are coming from, etc.

- Who currently visits GEWA?

31% children  
13% teenagers  
31% adults  
25% senior citizens

- Where are the visitors coming from?

31% local residents  
42% regional residents  
21% national  
6% international

- What are their characteristics such as age, ethnicity, mobility, family groups, individuals, group visitations, international visitors?

1% alone  
13% peer groups  
32% organized groups/tours  
31% nuclear family  
6% extended family  
7% multiple family  
5% partial family

5% other

Of these...

2% are persons with disabilities

2% are non-English-speaking

7% minority

10% of summer visitors are Asian.

- Other visitation issues?

- Local visitation dropped with the introduction of entrance fees.

- Considering the local Westmoreland County is 60% African American, visitation to the park by African Americans is low.

- Visitation is heaviest in the middle of the day when the staff is taking lunch.

- Who attends special events and how many attend?

Local, regional and some traveling public. Visitation jumps 200-300% from normal weekend visitation.

## **GPRA Visitor Satisfaction and Understanding Survey**

In 1998, 97% of visitors were satisfied with the overall quality of visitor facilities, services and recreation opportunities (Goal IIa1) at GEWA and 63% understand something of the significance of the park (Goal IIb1). The complete study is located in the Interpretive Database.

## **Education Program User Profile:**

School groups visit the park primarily between April 15 and June 10, with a few attending in October. They typically focus on the 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. time slot because of their need to travel within regular school hours. All schools are within 1 to 1½ hours to the park. The major metropolitan areas of Washington, Richmond and Hampton Roads are about 2 hours away, and their schools do not currently visit GEWA. The park does plan to broaden its reach to these more distant school systems in the near future with the new emphasis on the curriculum based education program.

Three to five groups per day visit the park for school programs ranging in size from 20 to 150 students and adults per group. Grades represented are mostly kindergarten through sixth, and the majority of those are third and fourth grade with

an occasional middle or high school group.

## ISSUES AND INFLUENCES AFFECTING INTERPRETATION

The interpretive program must be responsive to issues which have an affect on visitors' ability to experience and understand the park resources and stories. During the interpretive planning process, the team identified the following situations which should be considered in determining the future interpretive program.

1. **Exploring the park and related resources:** Currently, most visitors to GEWA do not explore the entire park beyond the area around the visitor center, birth house foundation and Memorial House. Visitors are missing resource-based interpretive opportunities including the Washington Family burial ground, the Potomac River shoreline and several trails. This situation is encouraged by calling the area near the birthsite the "historic area" The entire park is a historic area which includes a commemorative area around the birthsite. Also, interpretation is not available at all the historically significant resources which lie beyond the commemorative area such as the memorial obelisk, Washington family agricultural ditches.
2. **Site of original birth house:** This is the most important and significant resource of the park, yet the overall visitor experience is underwhelming. The birth house foundation is delineated with oyster shells to mark its place and is accompanied by a nearby wayside which describes what is known about the house and associated events. Without the boost of an interpreter, the place could easily be glanced over or missed altogether. Many other items in the landscape, especially the Memorial House, compete for the visitor's attention at this spot and quickly draw them away from the birth place.
3. **Commemorative colonial landscape:** Visitors do not understand that GEWA's landscape represents a generic colonial plantation commemorating Washington's birth and not a recreation of the Washington plantation. The interpretive program only barely addresses commemorating Washington so visitors quickly lose this focus and instead concentrate on other things such as material culture items, architecture and rare breeds of livestock. The generic colonial setting is so pleasant as to be misleading about how a colonial plantation really looked and what plantation life was really like.

**Memorial House:** Because many visitors expect to see and seek out a standing structure for the "birthplace", they assume that the Memorial House is the birth house. Its strong presence in the landscape challenges interpretation to provide clear and accurate messages about the significance of the house to eliminate this confusion. Also, personal service messages convey an apologetic tone for the location of the Memorial House since the original intention was to locate it on the actual birthsite. This apology does not contribute to visitor understanding and appreciation for the park's significance.

Once in the house, visitors' attention is focused on building architecture and furnishings representing colonial material culture rather than stories about Washington and efforts to memorialize him. Occasionally interpretive talks in the house refer to the Washingtons as though they actually lived in the house.

**Kitchen, weaving and blacksmithing buildings:** These buildings are filled with objects representative of a generic colonial plantation. The objects themselves have a weak thematic connection to George Washington and distract visitors away from the real significance of the site. How can these objects and those in the Memorial House be better used to tell the story of George Washington?

**Farm:** While the farm setting with rare animal breeds contributes to the overall generic colonial plantation atmosphere, it needs to be tied more closely to the new themes. There is a need to determine the carrying capacity of the farm in order to maintain a healthy herd and to improve the holding pens to help with animal handling.

4. **Education program:** The current education program for organized school groups is limited. It is not curriculum based, gives teachers whatever they ask for based on tradition, and tends to draw young grades, probably because GEWA is a nice place to visit for young children, especially to see the animals. There is no parkwide effort to develop a curriculum-based education program or life-long learning opportunities, and no way to evaluate whether current programs are effective.
5. **Visitor center and park film:** Most visitors enter the visitor center, perhaps view the film, then exit as directed to walk the trail along Popes Creek until they reach the actual site where Washington's birth house once stood. The visitor center contains a few outdated displays of archeological artifacts and family geneology. The displays do not meet current standards for exhibits and do not provide a positive contribution to a visitor's experience. Overall, there's not much to see in the visitor center.

The park film is outdated and leaves visitors with the impression that the Memorial House is the birth house. The film conveys messages about the material culture of the period of Washington's youth and borders on glamorizing those days gone by. It does not focus on Washington, the man or his family and culture. The film does not clearly portray the enslaved labor and indentured servitude which was used to support the plantation operations.

6. **Thematic links:** Visitors are not aware of places in the area beyond park boundaries which are thematically linked to George Washington such as Ferry

Farm (Washington's childhood home) and the City of Fredericksburg's monument to Mary Ball Washington (Washington's mother).

7. **225<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the American Revolution**: Explore joining this NPS effort so that GEWA is participating in this celebration very much a part of Washington's making.
8. **Cost recovery**: Some visitors bypass the visitor center and explore the park on their own without paying the entrance fee. Also, there are untapped opportunities to use fee authorities to generate revenue.
9. **Current scholarship**: GEWA staff involved in interpretation and visitor services do not meet on a regular basis to share ideas and express observations. Also, the staff needs to continue to set time aside for professional enrichment and keeping abreast of current scholarship. The park library is underutilized by staff.
10. **Opportunities for working with others**: Not only are there opportunities to work with local teachers in developing the education program but with local colleges as well (especially education history and historic preservation departments regarding interns or senior projects, etc., and help from academics.) The ongoing memorialization of Washington also provides opportunities to work with other parks who have Washington stories (American Revolution, Constitutional Convention, the Presidency, French and Indian War, westward settlement [like canals, etc.]) as well as state and local tourism efforts and other nearby historic sites (Stratford Hall, Fredericksburg, etc), organizations (Masons, Daughters of the Revolution, Boy Scouts, Society of Cincinnati, David Library, 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Revolution, etc.).
11. **George Washington Birthplace National Memorial Association**: The Association is an outgrowth of the Wakefield National Memorial Association which was organized June 11, 1923, by Mrs. Josephine Wheelwright Rust, a Washington descendant. This Wakefield National Memorial Association raised the funds to build and furnish the Memorial House and Colonial Kitchen and landscape the surrounding grounds. The association gave this memorialized historic area to the United States Government in 1932 as a gift for the 200<sup>th</sup> Birthday of George Washington. The site was placed under the administration, maintenance and protection of the Department of Interior, National Park Service.

George Washington Birthplace National Memorial Association and the park work in partnership to serve and educate visitors about George Washington, his character and his influences upon the times he lived in and beyond. The present day association operates the gift shop and bookstore for visitors' convenience. Visitors are able to purchase quality books from a variety of



thematic topics to continue their education after visiting the park. A tasteful variety of souvenir items allows visitors to take home a unique physical memento of their George Washington Birthplace experience.

The association board of directors provides an annual discretionary fund to both the park superintendent and chief ranger. In addition to this direct monetary aid, the association donates items from the gift shop that are used in the course of daily interpretive operations or may be used as recognition gifts for volunteer-in-parks or as gifts for very special park visitors. Association members volunteer their time and assist the park interpretive staff during annual special interpretive events. The association also provides for public advertisement in local newspapers and tourist brochures to make the public more aware of the park, interpretive events and the purpose of the association.

Most recently the association board members have taken a more active role to work with park staff in providing for the care and conservation of textiles and historic furnishings within the Memorial House. This assistance is through both volunteer projects by members and donation funding approved by the board.

George Washington Birthplace National Memorial Association is experiencing internal review and improvement of its operations and ways to assist the park. The association is moving into a new level of development as the parks' needs increase and the board members become aware of their responsibility. Park management, interpretive staff members and association board members are meeting regularly to insure continued support and cooperation for the future.

12. **Terminology**: Visitors are not familiar with local geography and local terminology which creeps into interpretive program messages such as: Tidewater Virginia; landed gentry; gentleman farmer, polite society, and references to local towns, counties and attractions.

## **PART II. GEORGE WASHINGTON BIRTHPLACE NATIONAL MONUMENT'S FUTURE INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM**

### **OUTREACH AND PRE-ARRIVAL**

**Desired future:** Potential and virtual visitors find information about GEWA which builds anticipation and appropriate expectation and provokes them to visit the site. They find information that conveys...

...what to expect at GEWA and where and how to visit it and related sites.

...that George Washington was born in a house on the Washington plantation and its site is known and marked by remnants of its foundation.

...an overview of interpretive themes and park programs.

...location and brief information about other NPS sites in close proximity to GEWA.

#### **Actions needed:**

- Review and update all information available to the public to ensure information is comprehensive and achieves the desired future condition. Promotional outlets include local and state tourism services; chambers of commerce; popular reading magazines; local newspapers; radio stations; rack cards; road maps, and web site.
- Investigate opportunities and feasibility for local public access on television.
- Investigate feasibility of installing a Travelers Information Station (TIS).
- Identify sites related to George Washington and include them in pre-arrival messages such as Ferry Farm, Mount Vernon, Mary Ball Washington's burial place, and Christ Church in King George's County where Washington attended services.
- Include other NPS sites in close proximity to GEWA in pre-arrival messages such as Thomas Stone National Historic Site, Fredericksburg and Stratford Hall National Historic Landmark.
- Rewrite web page to make it more in line with focusing interpretation on George Washington and his family and not on a generic plantation and the Memorial House. Update the adjacent visitor sites information to include other Washington sites like Ferry Farm. Also include information on all trails associated with the park.

## **ORIENTATION AND ACCESS**

**Desired future:** Visitors arriving to GEWA and seeking information about what there is to see and do will...

...feel that they are entering a special, well-cared for place.

...find all the information they need in one location to make informed choices about how to explore GEWA, the surrounding area, and associated sites.

...understand that they are visiting a commemorative landscape and not a recreation of the Washington plantation.

...find good access to visitor service facilities, natural/cultural resources and interpretive programs in accordance with universal accessibility principles.

...find information about education programs and opportunities.

...understand that GEWA is part of the National Park System.

### **Actions needed:**

#### **Overall**

- Display the NPS arrowhead consistently where appropriate on all entry and key wayfinding signs, park publications, public presentations and other materials for public consumption.
- On the entrance road before the park entry install a sign which conveys that visitors are entering a fee area and that the entrance fee should be paid at the visitor center. The sign should not display the fee area symbol that is not understood by visitors.
- Investigate a redesign of the entrance sign so that the official park name boldly appears at the entrance. Current entrance sign states in bold letters “Popes Creek Plantation” which is confusing when visitors are looking for George Washington Birthplace National Monument.
- Create a pull-off area near the entrance sign where visitors can safely get out of their vehicles and pose next to the sign for their souvenir photo.
- Camouflage or move the mailboxes now appearing in the traffic circle around the memorial obelisk.

- Prepare and implement a comprehensive sign plan which includes:
  - a wayfinding sign system for outside park boundaries and within park. As part of this, delete the abbreviation “NM” and the fee area symbol from road signs since the public does not recognize their meanings.
  - interpretive signs (wayside exhibits and signs)
  - informational signs (directions, orientation panels, instructions, etc.)
  - trailhead information
- Upgrade the Unigrid park folder and web site to strengthen emphasis on new interpretive themes and to reflect all trails, pedestrian pathways and historic resources accessible to the public.
- Change all references to the area now called “historic area” to the “commemorative area.” The entire park is a historic area.
- Implement action items in park’s accessibility plan located in the park’s Interpretive Database.
- Re-establish the original entrance from the Memorial Obelisk through the commemorative area and make it accessible to pedestrians.
- Produce a detailed self-guiding interpretive park map which guides visitors throughout the entire site and conveys thematically linked interpretive messages connected to park resources identified on the map.
- Insert a wayfinding message in the cedar grove where the path divides to indicate where the trail leads so that visitors walking from the visitor center up to the birthsite are sure of the way to go.
- Ensure that all images and messages about Washington plantation activities include indentured servants, enslaved Africans, women, children and others associated with plantation living as appropriate.

### **Visitor Center**

**Desired future:** Visitors will be able to...

...find orientation to the park and to available visitor services.

...receive an overview of the interpretive themes and opportunities in the park to learn about Washington’s family and the context of his birth.

...find a clearinghouse of information on sites associated with George Washington within and outside NPS.

...have access to educational resources and information.

**Immediate actions needed:**

- Remove items to clear large window of obstructions such as floor plants and overhead window treatment for open views of Popes Creek.
- Eliminate materials in the visitor center that are confusing, worn-out, obsolete and don't serve an obvious purpose for visitors.
- Hang banners and other items which convey messages associated with themes filling in the ample bare wall space and high ceilings. Use George Washington quotes or writings about George Washington as appropriate.
- Create a family exploration area with age appropriate items linked to themes.
- Move family tree diagram away from restroom entrances.
- Create new display using artifacts currently on exhibit in a manner which places them in a context to convey themes.
- Convey information to visitors on research in progress or recently completed research such as important archeological discoveries and new information about Washington's life.

**Actions needed:**

- Near visitor center entrance, install an exterior sign to be viewed by visitors walking up to the entrance. The sign should clearly display visitor center hours of operation, overall park hours, fee schedule, a basic map and emergency phone numbers.
- Inside the visitor center using an appropriate exhibit design, orient visitors to the site by showing them a physical overview of the extent of the Washington family plantation lands at the time of George Washington's birth, and the location of all historic sites and features that are accessible to visitors today. This way visitors can make informed choices about what there is to see and do and plan their visit accordingly.
- Prepare and implement an exhibit plan to include the following:
  - world timeline with Washington's place in it;
  - the world Washington was born into and the Washington family;
  - overview of Washington's life and achievements (farmer, soldier, statesman);
  - overview of all efforts to memorialize George Washington (visitors will find in-depth exploration of GEWA development and commemoration activities in the Memorial House).

- Current interior access ramp uses too much usable space. Get help in redesigning the visitor center interior to optimize space while meeting accessibility requirements.
- Install a wayside on the deck overlooking Popes Creek in a place that does not intrude upon the view. Link interpretive message to park themes including location of plantation chosen because of water and rich natural resources, comparisons of setting now and then (river and creek were more congested), the role the Chesapeake Bay played in the Washington plantation.
- Produce new film to focus on George Washington's life, the culture he was born into, values he held, his education and life experiences, his accomplishments. Should include an overview of Washington's permanent residences like Ferry Farm and Mt. Vernon. Should be honest and compelling while reflecting current historical thought.

#### **Visitor center parking lot**

- Move or eliminate fee sign currently located inside the entrance of parking lot since it is easily missed.
- Install more tree islands in lot to soften and green-up the sea of asphalt and to provide relief from heat.

#### **Trails**

**Desired future:** Visitors will find opportunities to...

...understand the location of various trails and what each trail features.

...understand more about George Washington and his world.

...have self-guided options that achieve interpretive theme objectives.

#### **Actions needed:**

- Establish trailhead orientation panels at key locations for the various trail systems
- Explore creating a trail booklet to be sold by the Association that includes all the parks trails and descriptions of their salient features.
- Investigate the construction of a new interpretive trail loop that would lead from the existing Washington family burial ground parking area past the pond, Henry Brooks site (first English patentee), Potomac River shoreline, Digwood Swamp, and along an existing farm lane back to the parking area.

The trail would closely follow a trail proposal identified in the 1968 Master Plan for the park. The trail would provide access to resources which hold meaning for the Washington family era and would encompass site-specific features of the landscape that are thought to have existed during the Washington family period such as agricultural fields, drainage ditches, and circulation systems, etc.

- Re-establish the pedestrian connection between the commemorative area and Duck Hall Point through the construction of a footbridge across Dancing Marsh according to the historic documentation of the bridge that existed on the site in 1941 so that visitors can walk between the visitor center and these other points without driving.

## **ON-SITE EXPLORATION**

**Desired future:** Visitors will be able to...

...explore the entire park, not just the commemorative area.

...understand that the commemorative area is a historic designed landscape conceived to commemorate George Washington, and not the Washington reconstructed plantation. As such, it is part of a larger context of commemorative efforts undertaken on site since the early nineteenth century.

...explore the Northwest Fields and Dancing Marsh areas of the park and know that they are the best examples of landscape as it most likely existed during the Washington Family era.

...experience interpretive programs which use the farm exhibit to convey thematically-based messages.

...find interpretive installations within the commemorative landscape which complement its historic design.

...find actual quotes and drawings associated with George Washington used in both personal and non-personal services throughout the park.

...participate in curriculum-based programs and life-long learning opportunities.

## **Actions needed:**

### **Overall**

- Provide uniformed ranger led tours at regularly set times each day starting at the visitor center. All formal talks take place outside of buildings, weather permitting. After the talks visitors will have opportunities to explore resources, including interiors, at their own pace.
- Consider phasing out stations with costumed interpreters on a regular, daily basis except for special programs and events.
- Consider positioning a roving interpreter in the area of the Washington Family Burial Ground.
- Consider positioning a roving interpreter in the commemorative area.
- During weekdays during the school season focus bulk of interpretive resources on school groups. Undertake an educational plan to identify implementation steps.
- Offer ranger-led hikes of trails incorporating park themes into talk.
- Offer special programs on weekends and at other times that focus on aspects of the interpretive themes. Costumed interpretation could be used during special programs
- Retain and maintain the Eastern red cedar grove (part of commemorative landscape) at Burnt House Point. Rehabilitate this grove based on the recommendations outlined in the Preservation Maintenance Plan.
- Retain and maintain the allee of Eastern red cedars and deciduous hardwoods along the original entrance route into park (part of commemorative landscape). Rehabilitate the allee based on the recommendations outlined in the Preservation Maintenance Plan.

### **Birthsite**

- During ranger-led walks, interpreters should move visitors around so that they are viewing trees and Popes Creek in the background as they ponder George Washington's birth so that their attention is not drawn toward the Memorial House, commemorative structures and farm animals.
- Re-design birthplace area to strengthen its presence and to be more provocative such as placing a marker ceremoniously to commemorate Washington's birth.



- Convey through messages a metaphorical “gateway” between the actual birthsite and the commemorative landscape and tell visitors that they will be crossing over into an educational/museum-like setting to learn more about the circumstances of George Washington and the culture into which he was born.

### **Memorial House**

- Consider re-routing the ranger-led walk by entering the house from the Popes Creek side so that all visitors, including those in wheelchairs, use the same entrance and to focus the visitor’s attention on the setting and the importance of waterways to the plantation.
- Deliver interpretive talks focused around park themes prior to entering structure so that visitors are focused on the themes before their curiosity is peaked by the numerous objects representing the colonial material culture.
- Consider dedicating a room in the house for visitors to further explore the evolution of the designed commemorative landscape and the significant commemorative activities that have taken place over the years. This commemorative story should be introduced in the visitor center.
- Consider changing the name of the “Memorial House” to something like the “Memorial Museum” to help visitors understand that the house is not George Washington’s birth house.

### **Slave Quarters**

- Create an exhibit within the historic core area that would interpret slave life typical to the region in the mid-eighteenth century. The exhibit should be sited in a commemorative landscape. The design of the exhibit would preferably be based on site-specific knowledge of slave life on the plantation. In the absence of documentary and archeological information, base the design on a typological model developed through the study of similar structures identified at other regional plantation sites. Over time, revise the exhibit as necessary to reflect new scholarship in the field, or actual site conditions as determined through archeological investigations at the park. (See “Research” under “Support for the Interpretive Program: later in the plan.)

### **Colonial Garden and Orchard**

- Find a partner to help manage the garden.
- Create a wayside for the garden that focuses on the use of colonial gardens during the 1930s for commemorative purposes; how the park is managing the garden today; and about types of plants typically found in a colonial garden.

- Return garden features to the commemorative period (1896-1941), if possible, using the latest scholarship about appropriate materials.

- Recreate the 1939 memorial orchard in the commemorative area. Plant varieties of the species included on the 1939 sketch that are disease and pest resistance in order to limit pesticide and fungicide applications. Consider varieties that are also resistant to apple cedar rust.
- Develop a self-guided brochure that interprets garden plant varieties and use plant labels to identify species.

#### **Kitchen, weaving, blacksmithing and other outbuildings:**

- Evaluate how the objects displayed in these buildings might be used to contribute to visitor understanding of interpretive themes. Eliminate items that distract attention and focus too much on colonial life and crafts. Use these items during special events and programs as appropriate and to reinforce how Washington and his family used similar objects, and why.
- Deliver interpretive talks focused around park themes prior to entering structures so that visitors are focused on the themes before their curiosity is peaked by the various objects representing the colonial material culture.
- Tie kitchen and garden experience together in the ranger-led tour and use these sites as a launching point to talk about role of enslaved Africans and indentured servants during the Washington era and to talk about Washington's views on slavery up through his death.

#### **Farm**

- Establish new enclosure pens for livestock to provide opportunities for visitors to view animals accompanied with interpretation tied to park themes.
- Seek partners to assist in operation and maintenance of the farm and livestock. Solicit the support of breeders interested in the old breeds.

#### **Memorial Obelisk**

- Install a wayside that conveys the meaning of the monument as per the memorialization theme.
- Determine if there is a need to create a pull-off area near the Memorial Obelisk for visitors to safely get out of their vehicles to examine the feature more closely.

#### **Ice Pond**

- Interpret the significance of the ice pond on a wayside and in a self-guiding brochure

### **John Washington Family Lands**

**Desired future:** Visitors will be able to...

...visualize the size and extent of the Washington holdings compared with today.

...understand why the Washingtons as well as people before, settled the lands.

...understand how the land was managed for agricultural production during the Washington family occupancy.

...recognize features in the landscape dating from the Washington family era such as witness trees and drainage ditches.

#### **Actions needed:**

- Consider interpreting the John Washington Family (George Washington's great grandfather) site via a variety of interpretive media, including personal services using the remaining landscape features and archeological remains to weave stories about the Washingtons.
- Consider marking and interpreting key archeological resources associated with the John Washington Family using materials and methods that do not disturb the below-ground resources.
- Decide on vegetation management strategies. Woodlands could be established to approximate the vegetative composition that existed in the region in the 18th century or re-establish open agricultural fields to support the interpretation of Washington family period patterns of spatial organization.

### **Washington Family Burial Ground**

**Desired future:** Visitors will be able to...

...identify who is buried in the cemetery and their family relationships.

...explain why the cemetery looks different today than when it was originally created.

#### **Actions needed:**

- Produce a wayside that identifies the interred and shows their relationship to George Washington.

### **Potomac River Shoreline**

**Desired future:** Visitors will be able to...

...explain why the shoreline is in a different place today than when the Washingtons lived here.

...explain the importance of the river for the Washingtons as well as settlers before them.

...explain protection strategies for the Potomac River and implications for the Chesapeake Bay.

#### **Actions needed:**

- Through waysides, the proposed trail booklet (under “Orientation and Access, Trails), ranger-led walks/talks and education programs, interpret the river’s importance to the Washington plantation and current efforts to protect it.

### **EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

**Desired future:** Participants (school children, educators and adult learners) will be able to...

...participate in grade appropriate curriculum-based education programs.

...participate in development of curriculum based park programs.

...experience education programs linked to park themes.

...find life-long learning opportunities.

...find opportunities to provide feedback.

...have access to pre and post materials to support the learning experience.

...find a continuum of opportunities that connect to elementary and high school levels.

#### **Actions needed:**

- Consider creating an education specialist position in the appropriate series and grade level.

- Develop an education plan that addresses how the park will meet the needs of the educational community.
- With the involvement of teachers, create teacher-led programs for GEWA targeted to younger grades (kindergarten to third) so that the park staff can focus on the Virginia State Standards of Learning for fourth through sixth grades.
- While phasing out existing general school programs, start the curriculum-based programs by focusing on one to begin with such as the “How Math Changed Washington’s Life” program. Continue to build curriculum-based programs using the experiences of getting the first one off the ground.
- Consider working with Ferry Farm and teachers to create a curriculum-based experience at Ferry Farm, and to coordinate education experiences between GEWA and Ferry Farm.
- Offer workshops for teachers on the curriculum-based programs available at GEWA.
- Work more proactively with the annual Stratford Teachers Conference and create an agenda that focuses on George Washington rather than colonial crafts and material culture.
- Make available resources and materials for educators.
- Create ways to evaluate curriculum-based programs.

## **DEPARTURE AND POST-VISIT**

**Desired future:** Visitors will have opportunities to...

...provide feedback to the park about their experience.

...find information about what there is to do in the area associated with George Washington and find information about other sites that commemorate George Washington both in the vicinity and throughout the country.

...find sales item linked to park themes which further their interest and knowledge about George Washington.

...find information about future programs at the site.

...experience variety in their visits and will want to return.

...explore partnering opportunities that extend the educational experience beyond the park.

**Actions needed:**

- Review and update current scope of sales to include more George Washington related publications and items and less on generic colonial Virginia.
- Encourage staff to bring in potential sales items and books for review for sale in bookstore.
- Explore the potential to sell cuttings that are rooted when historic plantings are pruned.
- Create a way to gather visitor comments about their experience.
- Evaluate ways to increase sales.
- Create a brochure/site bulletin listing sites associated with George Washington in NPS and beyond and discuss efforts to memorialize him.

**Special Events and Programs**

**Desired future:** Visitors will have opportunities to...

...have different experiences related to George Washington's life.

...relate to and focus on important dates/seasons in George Washington's life.

**Actions needed:**

- Incorporate messages anchored in themes at every opportunity.
- Use different objects during special program, and use the objects as launching-off places to tell theme-related stories. Don't focus on the object or material culture, per se.
- Celebrate a variety of events, important dates and seasons in George Washington's life such as his birthday; his death and how it affected people; Congressional passage of legislation to celebrate Washington's birthday; naming of the nation's capitol, etc.
- Tie into events sponsored by others and partner with them .
  - bicentennial of Washington's death
  - 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Revolution celebration plans

## **OFF-SITE PROGRAMS AND LINKS**

**Desired future:** Visitors will be able to...

...find information about sites that are associated with George Washington both within and beyond the National Park Service

...visit one other site associated with George Washington as a result of their visit to GEWA

### **Actions needed:**

- Ensure that visitors have easy access to current information about sites associated with George Washington both within and beyond the Service through the web and in the visitor center, such as Fort Necessity National Battlefield, Valley Forge National Historical Park, Mount Vernon and Ferry Farm.

### **Ferry Farm:**

- Work with foundation to develop and integrate new interpretive program with GEWA's program.
- Consider conveying how researchers think the site looked during Washington's childhood, and interpret ongoing research, including what has been determined to date, through appropriate personal programs and media. Interpret these findings at the GEWA visitor center and in more depth at Ferry Farm.

## **SUPPORT FOR THE INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM**

**Desired future:** Administrative, professional and facility support is in place to adequately serve and nurture park personnel responsible for the park's interpretive program

### **Actions needed:**

### **Human Resources/Partnerships**

- Consider creating an education specialist position in the appropriate series and grade level.
- Strengthen public outreach function including promotion of park's existence, programs and special events, and professional articles and meetings with potential partners.



- Work with interpretive staff to stay on target with the Interpretive Development Program to demonstrate competency.
- Set regularly scheduled times for all staff associated with the park's interpretive program to meet to share ideas and to resolve issues.
- Periodically invite subject matter experts to the park to talk informally with park staff about interpretive content to keep abreast of current scholarship.
- Schedule time for staff to use library and research material for interpretive programs.
- Purchase/acquire books and material that reflect the latest scholarship on Washington and his family and how we commemorate Washington and how we establish and interpret historic farms and gardens.
- Recruit more volunteers and hold orientation sessions with them including familiarization of park themes and interpretive competencies.
- Find a partner and volunteers to assist in establishing and operating a plant nursery to propagate historic plantings. Cultivate cuttings of important individual historic plants, including the hackberry tree and fig shrubs, as replacements for existing specimens when they become overmature or die.

### **Research**

- Continue to investigate, through research, the original planting design for the commemorative area and consider replacing missing plantings in-kind based on available documentation dating from the 1930s and early 1940s.
- Undertake additional research into the history of the Colonial Garden. Develop a treatment approach to the garden based on research and analysis to determine which of the various planting designs that exist for the garden is preferable to the park based on their overall vision and goals for the park.
- Complete archeological surveys.
- Research cultural history of enslaved Africans for the Washington Family and incorporate findings into new slave quarters exhibit in the commemorative area.

### **Site Management/Administrative**

- Investigate opportunities for cost recovery, especially fee programs.
- Consider as part of upcoming GMP current building uses and need for artifact storage. (A new building is not the only solution or even the best solution.)

- Evaluate need for restrooms in the commemorative area.
- Evaluate how to increase sales.

**Recreation Areas (picnickers, swimmers, hikers, etc)**

- Create opportunities for all recreationists within the park to explore park themes using a variety of media, such as publications, waysides, personal services, etc.
- Place interpretive publications in the picnic and beach areas..



## **APPENDIX**

### **STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PLAN MISSION GOALS FOR INTERPRETATION**

The following mission goals for GEWA have direct implications for interpretation:

**Category I: Preserve park resources.**

GEWA Mission Goal 1a. The park's cultural and natural resources are preserved, protected and maintained in good condition.

**Category II: Provide for the public enjoyment and visitor experiences of parks.**

GEWA Mission Goal: Park facilities and services are maintained at a quality level to insure visitor enjoyment, safety and accessibility.

GEWA Mission Goal: Park visitors experience the sights, smells, sounds and ambiance of an 18<sup>th</sup> century colonial plantation as they learn the Washington family story.

**Category IV: Ensure organizational effectiveness.**

GEWA Mission Goal: The necessary resources are provided to park staff to insure that service-wide and park goals are effectively achieved.

GEWA Mission Goal: The park increases its managerial capabilities through assistance from other agencies, organizations and individuals

## **INTERPRETIVE PLANNING TEAM**

### **GEORGE WASHINGTON BIRTHPLACE NATIONAL MONUMENT**

Karen Beppler  
Betty Burkett  
John Davy  
Peggy Dening  
John Donahue  
John Frye  
Linda George  
James Laray  
Margaret Lewis  
Ruth Ann Muse  
Andrew Packett  
Patricia Reidy  
Roberta Samuel  
Diane Schwarting  
Martha Scott  
Larry Trombello  
Mimi Woodward

### **THOMAS STONE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE**

Martha Walker

### **UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA**

Jack Warren

### **OCULUS**

Liz Sargent

### **NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, WASHINGTON OFFICE**

Dwight Pitcaithley  
Sandy Weber

### **NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, BOSTON SUPPORT OFFICE**

Patti Reilly  
Kathy Tevyaw

### **NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, PHILADELPHIA SUPPORT OFFICE**

Don Briggs  
Tom Davies  
Kathy Dilonardo  
Patricia Gillespie  
Russ Smith